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## THE RELATION OF THEOLOGICAL DOGMA TO RELIGION.

Anyone who carefully observes the intellectual currents of our time must see that theological dogma is in a state of decay. It is slowly disintegrating, acted upon by various solvents, not the least important of which is the struggle of conflicting dogmas with each other. But, above all, dogmas decay by a law of their own nature. They have had their rise and culmination, and they must have their fall. The change is slow, but it cannot be prevented; and we have now reached a stage at which many people are asking not whether some particular dogma must go, but whether any theological dogma is necessary to religion.

Much has been written on the subject of religious evolution. In a recent important and suggestive contribution to the discussion,<sup>1</sup> Dr. McTaggart analyzes three dogmas which have been more or less closely identified with religion, namely: A Personal God, Free Will, and Human Immortality. With regard to the determination of the will, it seems to be a pure question of fact with which science ought to be competent to deal, and, if not already settled, it is probably in a fair way of being settled. This and the other two dogmas are examined at some length, and the conclusion is drawn that they all stand upon an insufficient basis of probability. The last of the three seems to Dr. McTaggart to have a little life in it yet,

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<sup>1</sup> J. E. McTaggart, "Some Dogmas of Religion."  
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but he admits that "there is no reason for a positive belief that immortality is true."

For the present purpose, it is immaterial whether we agree with these conclusions or not. They are results which have already been reached by many others. The significant fact is that certain dogmas which have long been regarded as fundamental postulates should, in the minds of any considerable number of earnest and competent students of religion, after passing through various changes of form, finally reach the *nirvâna* in which they disappear.

No attempt is here made at a detailed examination of Dr. McTaggart's treatment of the subject. The reader is referred to the book itself. But some brief reference will be useful. Defining dogma as "any proposition which has a metaphysical significance," and religious dogmas as "those whose acceptance or rejection by anyone would alter his religious opinion," he is convinced that on matters of dogma we cannot dispense with proof. Regarding some dogma as necessary to religion, he recognizes nevertheless the shifting and transitory character of the former.

"For centuries to come," he says, "we must resign ourselves to the admission that where we have dogma we shall have division." We may lose some dogmas altogether, but we do not lose them until they have ceased to be of use. Religion is, in itself, a desirable thing, but no one dogma can be regarded as essential to it. "Religion is clearly a state of mind. It is also clear that it is not exclusively the acceptance of certain propositions as true. It seems therefore that it may best be described as an emotion resting on a conviction of a harmony between ourselves and the universe at large. The phrase 'a true religion' is scarcely accurate, since religion is not a system of propositions, but an emotion." Yet that emotion is the result of an intellectual process. "No man is justified in a religious attitude except as the result of metaphysical study." "We need for religion to be able to regard the universe as good on the whole, and it does not appear that we could do this except on the basis of a general theory as to the ultimate nature of reality."

This at first sight seems a formidable statement; yet probably everyone has some theory as to the ultimate nature of reality. And presumably we all think the world good as a whole—good enough at least for us to continue to live in it; good enough also to have maintained its existence. Apparently we cannot help this feeling. There is a vital connection between us and the world analogous to that which is seen in the composite corals, where each corallite is connected with the whole by a communal structure. It is well, however, that we should not think too highly of the world; for we need to regard it as improvable in order to call forth our energy to the task of endeavoring to make it better.

Religion is perhaps the most profoundly significant fact in human experience; and it should not be altogether impossible to understand its nature—that is, what it is to all men, and has been at all times. The first thing which strikes us, with regard to it, is that it has both a permanent and a temporary character: the feeling appears to be constant, although the object perpetually changes. For scientific or historical purposes we have to take note of such differences as meet the eye. Each religious group or species is spoken of as *a* religion, each variety as a sect or denomination. Yet even in external peculiarities there is much general resemblance. In preserving the relics of the saints and attributing to them supernatural efficacy, the native Australian and the Roman Catholic are at one. The medicine-bag of the North American Indian, curious as it seems, is found in one form or other all over the world, even in the phylactery of the Jews; and a medicine man, whether in Africa, Australia, Greenland or Siberia, has to perform tricks of legerdemain or produce “spiritualistic” phenomena. And beneath all differences of form it is generally admitted that there is something characteristic of man which has given persistency to the historic religions. This thing we find it very hard to define. Its very simplicity, perhaps, has baffled us, its very depth eluded our analysis. Religion has been defined as various things. Perhaps one of the least illuminating of modern definitions is that of Prof. Tiele, who says, “The true essence of religion is found in the religiosity or religious frame

of mind." It is "the aggregate of all those phenomena which are invariably termed religious in contradistinction to ethical, æsthetical, political and others"<sup>2</sup>—which reminds one of the famous definition of an archdeacon as "a person who performs archidiaconal functions." Most of the definitions, however, seem to fall under two heads:

1. Those which make religion consist essentially of belief in one or more supernatural, superhuman or invisible beings.

2. Those which regard religion as an emotion toward the universe, or love of a moral ideal, or a perception of the fitness of things. As it does not necessarily exclude things "ethical, æsthetical and political," it may be called the ethical view.

Strangely enough, however, Tiele brings in the ethical element as characteristic of all the higher religions.<sup>3</sup> As we shall presently show, it is found in one of the lowest of all religions. In the first class, religion is a belief or opinion; in the second, it is a state. In the first, religion leads to "doing the will of God" or "pleasing God," or influencing God; in the second, to doing right. In the former, man sees his own image upon a background of the supernatural; and the belief that this is a reality is regarded as religion. Advantage has been taken of this by legislators, to ascribe to their laws a divine origin.

These definitions suffer from another disadvantage: they are based on phenomena which are always changing. The changes have been regarded as a process of evolution, but the evolution is that of theological ideas rather than of religion. Thus, man is represented as passing from magic, through animism and polytheism, to some one of the many forms of monotheism, and resting there. The earlier forms are apparently regarded as of use or as true only in reference to some final mode of thought. Thus, for a hundred thousand years, possibly, man has pursued illusions. The function of each theological conception has been to change into some other. But that process apparently has not ceased, as is proved by the varying beliefs held even by writers on the subject. We do not know what the next change is to be; but it is immaterial, as "religion" is

<sup>2</sup> C. P. Tiele, "Elements of the Science of Religion."

<sup>3</sup> *Op cit.* p. 63.

resolved into a succession of impermanent forms, the meaning and object of which elude our grasp.

The other class of definitions seems as a whole to fit into the facts better, and to indicate some stable and constant element which has survived through all theological changes. To this class Dr. McTaggart's definition apparently belongs. It is clearly out of the first class; and the harmony of the individual with the environment seems to be of the very essence of morals. It should be noted, however, that Dr. McTaggart would not define religion merely in terms of virtue or morality. He thinks that such a definition labors under the disadvantage of having two terms for the same thing. If religion be, as the Epistle of James says, active sympathy and purity of life, if it be merely enthusiasm for virtue, why not use words which are wholly unambiguous and drop the word "religion" altogether? There is much in this; but after all it is more a question of words than of things. If goodness, kindness, generosity, purity, love and so on, are things beautiful and excellent in themselves, they are not made better or worse by calling them religion; and much has been done in the name of religion of which we have reason to be ashamed. Yet it may be asked whether it may not be convenient to have one term which will not only cover all those qualities of character, but also help to explain them. For all religions are right in intention, and in that sense, and in that sense only, true. The motive is of the essence of the act; and the motive of religion has always been good, so far as it has expressed common action.

As things are best studied when reduced to their lowest terms, we might define religion as the instinct which impels all beings to seek that which is regarded as best. In its rudimentary forms it does not require us to assume more intelligence than we might expect from an average robin, or from a child who chooses the largest or the most highly colored of a number of apples. Indeed, the principle may be recognized at a still lower level in the cells of the human body to which we do not assign intelligence at all. We do not, of course, call any of these acts religion. The desire to act for the good of the community does, however, appear to be present in the actions of

the social insects, and in that we seem to have the germ of religion. Even the desire to "better one's self," to get on in life, might be described as an inverted form of religion: the energy and enthusiasm are there, but they miss their proper object. And thus this primal energy will go wide of the mark unless it is guided by intelligence and sympathy. It may be said to be religion which impels a man to save the life of another at the risk of his own. We say it is a natural instinct. Precisely so; because religion is natural. It is the world-spirit moving in us all—the universal inspiration. In this particular case we do not call it a religious act, because we give it a more definite qualification; but it seems to spring from a religious root, inasmuch as the more noble of two alternatives is chosen, and there is also the intelligent perception of an aggregate of which the individual is a part. This, however, is but an elementary form of the religious impulse: its higher forms appear in a continuous series of acts, adopted as the result of deliberate thought or flowing naturally from character.

Dr. McTaggart's definition of religion does not seem to be really inconsistent with the above view, although he says, "To do what I think right is obviously very different from the possession of an emotion which arises from a conviction of my harmony with the universe. Nor are they always found together." The act and the emotion, however, may only be different stages of the same thing. The true perception of my relation to the whole, and the internal impulse, become naturally translated into act accompanied by emotion. It is, of course, the breadth and clearness of the perception which give the highest value to the religious act.

So far, then, as we have been able to trace it, religion, though springing from the lowly root of a primitive impulse, becomes clearly articulate when it reaches an emotion and a desire which take account of the individual's relation to the whole, and therefore involve propositions which have a metaphysical significance. In this sense dogma may be said to be "necessary to religion." But of course that does not necessarily imply *theological* dogma. The genesis of this is known. It appears to have arisen from the play of the imagination upon an im-

perfectly known group of facts, producing an ever-changing phantasmagoria or a moving picture, answering to the development of experience and the changes in society; but, although it has largely determined the forms of religious activity, it does not constitute religion or its fundamental or essential principle. Mythology, magic, theology, even politics, have all come within the sphere of religion, but they have not created religion, nor do they appear to be necessary to it.

It will be sufficient for the present purpose to refer more particularly to the part which has been played by theology. It has been a considerable part, so considerable that it has perhaps received undue attention; and it cannot be denied that theological ideas have added largely both to the complexity and picturesqueness of religious forms. These ideas, inasmuch as they were inevitable, must have had a use. They seem to have been the horn book out of which man has gradually learned to spell the word "civilization." Imagination to him in early times was far more than fact. Indeed, for him it *was* fact. He

"Delightedly believes Divinities, being himself divine."

Theology took the part which is now played by medicine, government, the drama, and even football or horse-racing. Dice-throwing, or divination, was once sacred, and it is still part of a sacred ceremony in Tibet, where a lama annually beats a devil or ghost-king by means of loaded dice.<sup>4</sup> It is no wonder then that religion (theology) has been said to have sprung out of "a threefold illusion—the erroneous extension of the idea of personality, the confusion between concomitance and causality, and the failure to distinguish between dreams and reality."<sup>5</sup> And we cannot understand the dominant influence which theological and mythological ideas once exercised upon religious ritual, until we fully realize the nature of the illusions out of which they arose. The most important of these was the belief that the world was peopled by spirits. All the phenomena of nature were spiritual and personal—the rivers, trees, mountains, rocks, earth, sky, ocean, etc.—besides which the dead continued

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<sup>4</sup>L. A. Waddell, "The Buddhism of Tibet."

<sup>5</sup>Count Goblet d'Alviella, "Hibbert Lectures," 1891, p. 295.



to live on, frequently with increased powers or even elevated to the status of gods. The world to early man consisted of men, ghosts, spirits and gods; and so the area of his relationship, and consequently of his moral activities, was widened. All were members of the same commonwealth. The juice of the grape produced its sacred exaltation equally upon gods and men. The gods of Babylonia fortified themselves for their contest with Tiamat by drinking wine and mead.<sup>6</sup> The gods were called in to witness treaties: "The oath is taken in the presence of Zeus, Hera and Apollo, of the god of the Carthaginians, Hercules and Iolaus of Ares, Triton, Poseidon, of the gods that accompany the army, and of the sun, moon and earth, of rivers, harbors, waters, of all the gods who rule Carthage, of all the gods who rule Macedonia and the rest of Greece, of all the gods of war that are witnesses of this oath."<sup>7</sup>

The judicial oath has not yet passed out of vogue. Our jurisprudence is still leavened by theology. Children are sometimes not allowed to give evidence until they can say who will punish them if they tell a lie. Yet we can clearly see that theology is one thing and law another. In like manner theology may be distinguished from religion. Theology is the outcome of a reasoning process. Whether correct or incorrect, there is no moral value in it. But it is not difficult to see the moral purpose behind religion. It was concern for the general well-being not only of the human society but of the spirits and gods also. Is hospitality a right and proper thing? Then the gods must be asked to share all the food and drink consumed; and not only so, but, on account of their superior rank, they must be served first; and so arose the customs of sacrifice, libations and first-fruits. Do we respect the old, the virtuous, the powerful? Then respect must be paid to the gods.

We must consider, moreover, that man believed himself to be dependent upon spiritual powers for every necessary of life,

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<sup>6</sup> L. W. King, "Babylonian Religion and Mythology." Cf. Judges 9: 13, "Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?"

<sup>7</sup> Polybius. A treaty between Rameses II and the Hittites is couched in similar language (A. H. Sayce, "Early Israel").

for success in every undertaking, even for rain and sunlight. "Except Yahweh keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." Consequently means must be taken to ensure the continuance of the food-supply—a vital matter to us, but of overwhelming importance to early man, considering how ill-equipped he was for the struggle with nature. Hence, the New Hebridean prays to the sweet potato as he plants it, and planting is preceded by fasting and other religious exercises.<sup>8</sup> In Papua "the preparations for dugong- and turtle-fishing are most elaborate, and commence two months before the fishing is started. A head man is appointed, who becomes *belaga* (holy). He lives entirely secluded from his family, and is only allowed to eat a roasted banana or two after the sun has gone down. Each evening at sundown he goes ashore and bathes on the point of land overlooking the dugong fishing-ground. He dips his head in the water three times and throws medicine into the water."<sup>9</sup> The Ainu prays to the bear and millet cake which supply his table, and to the fire which cooks them.<sup>10</sup>

The tribes of Central Australia, whose theology, if it exists, is of a very rudimentary character, depute to each totemic group the duty of seeing that the particular object (animal or plant) which it represents shall be fruitful. This is done by the religious ceremony of the *Intichiuma*. Considering the difficulty of procuring food in so arid a region, it can easily be understood that the performance of these ceremonies is a religious duty because it is first a moral or social one. As to the method employed in all these cases, we have a survival in the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," in "grace before *meat*," and in the ecclesiastical blessing of herring-nets, etc.

All this is necessary for the ordinary daily needs of the community. And, if a man be a benefactor who makes two blades of grass grow where one grew before, those also must do the community a service who keep it from starvation. The savage does his *best*, for he is in deadly earnest. It is frequently neces-

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<sup>8</sup> S. H. Ray, *Journal Anthropological Institute* (1901).

<sup>9</sup> R. E. Guise, *Journal Anthropological Institute*, N. S., Vol. I.

<sup>10</sup> Batchelor, "The Ainu."

sary to the working of a charm among the Australians that blood should be made to flow,<sup>11</sup> and it is customary for one man to shed his blood to "strengthen" another man. But, in addition to these quotidian requirements, there were times of drought, famine, plague or war, when still more powerful measures were required. It was then that people gave to the gods of their best human offerings to secure the salvation of their country. Such sacrifices were acts of moral heroism when voluntarily made; and only an exclusive regard to their theological aspect makes us overlook their profound ethical significance. The theological element in religion only comes in when men are in the theological stage.

The moral element is sometimes very clearly seen in the initiation ceremonies of primitive people. These appear to be designed mainly to impress the neophyte with the seriousness of life, to teach him contempt of pain, fortitude and self-control, and to make him a useful member of the community.<sup>12</sup> Among the Australian natives oral instruction is given by the older men. The rules taught in southeastern Australia are: (1) to listen to and obey the old men; (2) to share everything they have with their friends; (3) to live peaceably with their friends; (4) not to interfere with girls or married women; (5) to obey the food-restrictions until they are released from them by the old men.<sup>13</sup> Here is a very respectable pentologue; and the best comment on it is perhaps the remark of Mr. Howitt, who witnessed the Jerail ceremonies: "That week passed without a single quarrel or dispute."

The ceremonies connected with burial would afford a further illustration. These are services or acts of kindness to the dead, and expressions of the grief of the living. The grief of the savage is often intense. In the New Hebrides the widow is

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<sup>11</sup> Spencer and Gillen, "Native Tribes of Central Australia." See also I Kings 18:28. Mr. S. Baring Gould mentions a curious survival in Brittany, where the farmers go to a church and fight with cudgels, crying out, "Give us wheat!" "Give us wheat, oats, and buckwheat!" "Drive away the frost." ("A Book of Brittany.")

<sup>12</sup> For the New Hebrides, see Codrington, "The Melanesians," p. 89. See also Spencer and Gillen, "Native Tribes of Central Australia."

<sup>13</sup> A. W. Howitt, "The Tribes of Southeast Australia."

secluded for one hundred days, except that she goes daily to weep at the grave-side. The relatives also seclude themselves, and the whole village weeps. Food is placed on the grave.<sup>14</sup> In the Binbinga tribe (Central Australia) the flesh of the dead person is sacramentally eaten. The bones are preserved, and a fire is kept burning. After the lapse of a year, there are more solemn performances, and a party is organized to punish the supposed bewitcher of the dead man.<sup>15</sup>

These examples will probably be sufficient to show that religion in the form of moral earnestness, or a desire to do the best for the whole community, is found where men are in the magical or non-theological stage, and have been, therefore, said to possess "no religion." This continues through the theological stage. The savage often fears and suspects rather than loves his deity, but he wishes to do justice to him. "Don't trouble about us," is an African's prayer. The Khonds argue with the rain-god, presenting him with eggs, arrack, rice, and a sheep, and point out to him that the seed will rot in the ground, men and cattle and wild animals must die, unless he speedily sends rain.<sup>16</sup> Yet the deities cannot be ignored. Egypt was ruled by gods of whom the king was an incarnation.<sup>17</sup> In West Africa "native tribal government and religious and social life are inseparably united."<sup>18</sup>

It will, of course, be readily conceded that the omission of the theological element would have greatly simplified the methods of religion; yet it is needless to speculate on what would have happened if the nature of things had been other than it is. When men were unacquainted with the nature of a headache, and sought relief by wearing their wives' headgear, how unreasonable it would have been to expect that they should grasp the nature of existence! Yet mythology and theology did an important work in the development of the human mind. They satisfied for a time man's desire for knowledge. They

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<sup>14</sup> Codrington, *op cit.*

<sup>15</sup> Spencer and Gillen, "Northern Tribes of South Australia."

<sup>16</sup> Tylor, "Primitive Culture."

<sup>17</sup> A. Wiedemann, "Religion of the Ancient Egyptians."

<sup>18</sup> R. H. Nassau, "Fetichism in West Africa."

produced tribal or national cohesion; but at the same time they often intensified race-hatreds. They encouraged the growth of a false morality; and, as theological dogma developed, it stifled thought, became often hostile to the religious spirit, and in the end seriously retarded the progress of humanity.

It has been put to the credit of theological dogma that it has built noble temples and cathedrals. That is true; although it is also true that theology has pulled them down. Theology in fact developed with the growth of society in a political direction. The temple became the symbol of the state; and the modern cathedral is after all but an attenuated survival of the temples of ancient Egypt, the Ziggurat of Babylon, and the Teocallis of Mexico. We could well dispense with many a noble edifice if the poor might be decently housed. Theology certainly did answer to a craving in man's mind for the vast; but its use was temporary. We have temples yet, and might have more were not warships so costly; but they are temples of art, science and legislation; and there is no reason why we should not have more temples of religion. Early Buddhism, which proclaimed that the desire for heaven was a fetter to the soul, has left in India some of the finest specimens of architecture in the world. And the principles which inspired the builders of those temples may be illustrated by an extract from one of the inscriptions of Asoka:

"Religion is an excellent thing; but what is religion? Religion is the least possible evil, much good, pity, charity, veracity, and purity of life. The organization of religion is thus the chief duty of government. For that purpose the king appoints inspectors, *distinct from the clergy* and the religious orders, whose work is of a higher importance than religious creeds and practices, namely, to promote humanity, good behavior and reverence. For this is the rule: government by religion, progress by religion, security by religion."<sup>19</sup> Asoka evidently lived before his time. He seems to have been the first builder of hospitals.

It may be worth while here to consider the claim that has

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<sup>19</sup> Burnouf. See Rhys Davids, "Buddhist India."

been set up, on behalf of theological dogma, that it has been, when thoroughly believed, a source of mental support, as indicated by the expression, "the consolation of religion." Indeed, Dr. McTaggart admits that, in seeking a reconstruction of religion, we want "something which brings with it rest and peace and happiness." The demand is a reasonable one, although it should not be unduly pressed. Increased knowledge and sensibility always bring a possible increase of pain; and it is one of the functions of religion to give us equanimity of mind and power to endure pain. Theological dogma, on the other hand, acts somewhat as a narcotic or stimulant. It is a rather dangerous ally; and is a not inconsiderable cause of insanity. Other things also will afford a similar support. The anarchist will face suffering and death as heroically as did the Christian martyrs. The native Australians gash the body, and purposely keep the wounds open, merely to express grief for a deceased relative.<sup>20</sup> They are proud of their scars; but there is no theological implication in this whatever. Vambéry relates that a dervish of Tebriz, who had a strong opinion respecting the Caliphate, took a vow thirty years ago that he would never utter any word but that of Ali (the son-in-law of Mohammed), and he had apparently kept his vow.<sup>21</sup>

But is it a fact that theological dogma has usually brought peace and rest and happiness? Prayers addressed to the demon of plague or the goddess of smallpox are not particularly restful. A bad god is usually prayed to in preference to a good one. In an old Babylonian fragment a man complains to Ea, Shammash and Marduk, that a spectre has fastened itself upon his back.<sup>22</sup> Had he known that it was merely lumbago, he would have been spared much disquiet, and would have sought out a proper remedy. Few poetical compositions are more pathetic than the Penitential Psalms of the Babylonians; and it is something for theology to have inspired such poetry; yet there is no doubt that it superadded to the pain of disease much distress of mind. The belief in the spiritual origin of disease must have

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<sup>20</sup> Spencer and Gillen, *op cit.*

<sup>21</sup> A. Vambéry, "His Life and Adventures."

<sup>22</sup> L. W. King, *op cit.*

been a perpetual terror, even when disease was not actually present. And theological dogma has not improved. To the troubles of this world it has added those of the world to come; and our real consolation is that we no longer believe it. It does not, however, leave us in peaceable possession even of this world. A Christian missionary, writing of South Africa, says, "Wars, drought, famine, pestilence, locusts, cattle plague; does it not seem as if the Almighty is recalling himself to a generation that was forgetting him?"<sup>23</sup> A decidedly unrestful belief, which attributes to the Almighty a character truly diabolical, and should dispose us to agree with Dr. McTaggart when he says that "no religion at all is better than a bad one."

Yet religion without theological dogma should help us to do away with many of the evils of life which are of our own causing, and to bear with equanimity those which are inevitable. In this respect we may learn even from the savages, whose initiation ceremonies, which include fasting and the infliction of severe physical pain, appear designed to train the youth to bear suffering with fortitude or indifference. And there remains the positive element of religion—the joy which arises from a felt harmony between ourselves and the universe. The intense love of good, and the strong desire to do as much good as possible, must surely bring with them a satisfaction more deep, real and lasting than any artificial consolation. What joy can equal that of the discovery of truth or the consciousness of having done good? And if a higher sympathy bring us new sorrows, a higher philosophy will help us to bear them.

Irrespective of all this, one is sometimes tempted to ask whether we are quite satisfied by being entirely happy as the result of favorable external circumstances. It was long ago said that it is better to suffer than to commit injustice. There is a certain noble satisfaction in suffering persecution, opposition, and even neglect. "So persecuted they the prophets that were before you." It measures the value of our work; and when we are conscious of the amount of suffering that there is in the

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<sup>23</sup> Coillard, "On the Threshold of Central Africa," 1897.

world, it is something to feel that at least we have shared what we cannot remove.

Another thing should be borne in mind, and that is the tendency of dogma to disappear, often when it is most wanted. Even if a drug be beneficial, it is of no avail when we have run out of it. Excess of ritual and dogma seems eventually, in all progressive communities, to provoke a reaction: In Palestine we see the protests of Isaiah, Micah and Jesus; in India the equally strong protest of Buddha. In modern times the old dogmatic theology has become transfigured or lost in philosophy. The idea of God, after passing through a variety of changes, has finally become an abstraction, a metaphor, or a memory. The gods have become fewer, less exacting, and ultimately less terrible. At a certain stage they melt into poetry or pass away altogether. This result of "evolution" is sometimes overlooked. The process does not end in some fixed type of theological thought, but in the disappearance of theology. One of the most significant facts of modern times is the growth of agnosticism, which is rapidly becoming a literary fashion. Agnosticism is not a religion; it is merely an attitude toward dogmatic theological affirmation; but an agnostic need not be and usually is not without religion. Indeed, so far as a person is agnostic, he should be the more susceptible to religion; his spiritual vision will be clearer, and he will be the better able to realize the possibilities of religion; for a higher order of action is possible to one who is no longer actuated by fear of punishment or hope of reward.

It has long been said of theological dogma that it is necessary to morals, and that the framework of society would dissolve if it be removed. This is rather curious when at the same time morality has been denounced as a sin. The fact is that morals existed before theology. The influence of the latter has been to give an artificial sanction to right action, and also to create artificial vices and virtues. Doubtless theology, while meaning well, has largely tended to make man selfish or to emphasize the lower form of morality, which consists of compliance, under the influence of hope or fear, with a written or unwritten code. Where there is obligation, external constraint, or the sense of



duty, there is no virtue or merit. This lower morality is that out of which religion enables us to rise; for religion teaches a man to give not the minimum but the maximum of service that is possible. Nor does it appear that dogmatic forms of religion have ever achieved any remarkable success. Papal Rome was never particularly pure; and the doings of the Camorra in Naples reveal an almost incredible state of moral turpitude. We may contrast this with Buddhism which, even when mixed with animism, seems always to have had an influence for good.

In connection with this point it is interesting to note the social and moral characteristics of races which have not yet arrived at any very definite theology, and have the most hazy ideas of the survival of human personality. Cranz found the Eskimo quite unable to understand the doctrine of human depravity. But we find that "the Greenlander's language is devoid of any real words for scolding. The slightest harshness in speaking is considered as an offense."<sup>24</sup> "The Greenlander is the most compassionate of creatures with regard to his neighbor."<sup>25</sup> Catlin said of the Mandans, "A better, more honest, hospitable and kind people as a community are not to be found in the world." He uses similar language of the Crows.<sup>26</sup> The Tchuelches of Patagonia are described as kindly and gifted with fine qualities of body and mind. Mr. Prichard mentions an instance: A strange Indian had shared his evening meal. The next morning he had gone, and all the horses were missing. They had strayed a long distance, and the Indian brought them back and went his way.<sup>27</sup> The pygmy Akkas of the Belgian Congo are said to have even no fetich rites. They become very angry at the merest suggestion of theft. Their courage is admirable, their contempt of death supreme. When they need bananas they help themselves, but always leave an equivalent in meat.<sup>28</sup> The natives of Niué are "honest, energetic, friendly and good tempered. Seduction, which was severely punished in

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<sup>24</sup> Rink, "Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo."

<sup>25</sup> Nansen, "First Crossing of Greenland."

<sup>26</sup> G. Catlin, "The North American Indians."

<sup>27</sup> H. H. Prichard, "Through the Heart of Patagonia."

<sup>28</sup> Burrows in *Journal Anthropological Institute*, 1899.

heathen times, is no longer resented.”<sup>29</sup> They have now learned to swear upon the Bible.

Such instances might be multiplied. The subject is a large one, and cannot be fully treated here. Physical conditions and racial character are no doubt important factors; but it is, to say the least, remarkable that wherever we study simple people who have not been spoiled by contact with Europeans, we often find even more than we associate with the word morality; and that occurs quite naturally, and not as the result of any dogma. This fact of itself is sufficient to show that morality has no need of theology.

It is not necessary to make invidious comparisons; yet they will sometimes force themselves upon us. The relations of Europeans with less cultured races have almost invariably been to the discredit of the former. We need not refer to the crimes of white settlers; but better things ought to be expected of the missionaries. Yet in 1811 a Mr. Janz annexed a territory in South Africa without mentioning a single word about the Bushman proprietors.<sup>30</sup> A controversy then arose between two rival missionary societies respecting the land. In spite of the suspicion felt regarding Europeans, one cannot help feeling sometimes that a white man is perhaps safer in the heart of Africa than in the heart of London or Paris or New York. To some extent, doubtless, this is the price we have to pay for increased social complexity; and perhaps we must take account of the fact that the success of the dominant races is partly owing to their lack of some of the virtues which we notice in savages. It is unnecessary to enlarge upon the vices of modern society; but the fact remains that eighteen centuries of theological dogma have not done for us in some respects so much as nature has done for the savage. The tendency on the whole has been to suppress that intelligence which is the foundation of all morality, to set nation against nation and sect against sect, to harden the feelings and suppress the finer motives. No society thrives upon a despotism; nor can humanity ever reach its goal under a spiritual despotism.

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<sup>29</sup> B. Thomson in *Journal Anthropological Institute*, 1901.

<sup>30</sup> Stow, “The Native Races of South Africa.”

What will remain to us when theological dogma is gone? The answer to this question should be easy. As a matter of fact it does not die until its work, whatever it may have been, for good or ill, is done. It departs because for us there is no longer any use for it. There is for it no more marching or counter-marching: it is dead. All that we can do is to decently inter it, and if possible prevent its ghost from rising again. What is left? All the inheritance of the ages of wisdom and culture. All the energy which theology once so largely absorbed and diverted from practical and practicable ends. There remains

"The primal sympathy  
Which having been must ever be."

"Love will not cease. There are other persons to love; and the non-existence of God would leave it as possible as it was before that love should be the central fact of all reality."<sup>31</sup> We were told on high authority that love to God and our neighbor comprehended the spirit of the Jewish religion. We enlarge that idea by turning it into love of the all. We may still cherish that love. To determine what exists is the work of intelligence; and, so far as our life is concerned, we can only benefit that which is known to exist. A personal God, if such should exist, would be only too glad to see men turn away from the vain attempt to benefit him to the beneficent work of aiding and uplifting mankind.

The reality is still left us when the illusions have faded. Religion is left; and religion as here understood is the most potent and most beautiful thing in the world.

"Religion involves believing in something good; and the belief in religion is itself something good."<sup>32</sup> Truly so; and religion is more than the belief in it. We need hardly trouble to ask ourselves whether we believe in it. We may or may not believe in the air we breathe. It supports our life all the same; yet an intelligent knowledge of it enables us to obtain from it the fullest advantage.

Religion can have no quarrel with theology as such, and can

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<sup>31</sup> J. E. McTaggart, *op cit.*

<sup>32</sup> J. E. McTaggart, *op cit.*

do either with or without it. As Hercules is Hercules, even when clad in rags, so religion has always made itself felt and recognized even under the most adverse circumstances. In the darkest theological night it has, in St. Francis Assisi, Thomas à Kempis and others, inspired beautiful lives. Theological dogma would have kept Europe in perpetual night, but it was saved by religion. The love of the highest will always lead man to something higher than he has yet attained—to something at least that is good, beautiful and true.

“Nothing is indispensable perhaps or even necessary; and it may well be that if the joy of doing good for the sake of good were taken away from the soul, it would find other purer joys; but in the meantime it is the most beautiful joy we know; therefore let us respect it.”<sup>33</sup>

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READING, ENGLAND.

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## SOME FACTS OF THE PRACTICAL LIFE AND THEIR SATISFACTION.

We distinguish two activities in our lives, the intellectual and the practical. In the former we seek the connection of facts according to law; in the latter we seek to realize ideals: the aim of the one is knowledge; the aim of the other is righteousness. In each of these activities we are successful only in part. There are contradictions in the intellectual realm, disappointments in the practical one, and no hope in either for any immediate change. But the failure in the practical world has disturbed man far more than his ignorance. Historically speaking, in the estimation of man *to do* seems to be more important than *to know*. From the very beginning he has been assured of his ignorance in the midst of an intelligible world, but his records show him bearing that ignorance and the pains and untimely deaths resulting therefrom with fortitude and equanimity compared with his anxiety over what seems to have been for him a more serious business—the attainment of righteousness—or, as he has been pleased to term it, his

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<sup>33</sup> Maeterlinck, “Wisdom and Destiny.”